

AUG 7 1992
ON THE AIR
Colin Seymour

Baseball wants Congress to do its dirty work

FAY Vincent and Major League Baseball can't control their children, so they expect Congress to do it.

Vincent wants Congress to restrict the duplication by cable superstations of other teams' broadcasts. The bratty superstations say "No!" every time Vincent tells them to respect their siblings' territories.

The brats are the Chicago Cubs, the pawn of superstation WGN, and the Atlanta Braves, the pawn of Turner Broadcasting.

Ted Turner held his breath and turned blue this week. "We would have to take Braves games off TBS" if Vincent's quest for control succeeds, he told the 58 million households that receive TBS. A barrage of 17,000

telegrams to Congress, forwarded by Turner, ensued in 24 hours, a

TBS spokesman said Wednesday.

Vincent has Congress' attention because sweeping legislation affecting the cable television industry has reached a joint conference committee. Vincent proposes an amendment to that legislation that would define major league territory as most of the United States, not just the 35-mile radius of a given ballpark that even the superstations respect. The Giants, for example, expect domain over Northern California, Oregon and Nevada.

TBS calls this the "extended blackout." Vincent claims it isn't extended at all and that a 35-mile radius protects only ballpark attendance, not television ratings.

Considering Major League Baseball's stake in television revenue and the amount of that revenue it has pledged to players as a result, consternation is understandable when a superstation horns in on another team's territory. Why would Bay Area fans fork over \$10 extra for SportsChannel each month if the Giants' game is also on a superstation?

TBS is squawking that it can't afford rebates to every cable company that would carry snow instead of Braves games on TBS, but no more than 10 percent of those 58 million homes would be blacked out for a given game.

It would, however, penalize the Mouth of the South for his Yankee ingenuity. It was very smart of Turner, the Cubs' owners and WOR-TV (which

broadcasts New York Mets games) to attach their signals to satellites in the 1970s so they could influence the cable industry.

A 150-mile radius might be reasonable, but most Oregonians live 600 miles from the Bay Area and are not Giants fans.

How ironic that Major League Baseball wants regulation by Congress. Baseball has continued to exist as a monopoly precisely because it persuaded the federal government against regulation.

Major League Baseball wants the advantages of government intervention without the disadvantages. Congress should scrap this amendment and tell baseball to settle its own squabbles.

TBS confident of win in cable-bill showdown

Tune in to TBS' Atlanta Braves-Cincinnati Reds games tonight and you'll likely hear Skip Caray relay a message of thanks from Ted Turner himself.

But don't bother listening for your name: The love note will only single out about a dozen members of Congress.



SPORTS ON TV

By Michael Hiestand

What a difference 48 hours can make. On Sunday's Braves cablecast, Caray urged viewers to write their members of Congress — "assuming they can read" — and then directed an enthusiastic Bronx cheer at politicians trying to pass legislation "without anybody knowing about it."

This is TV baseball?

Well, it is for now. Whether we can all now go back to regularly scheduled programming depends on who you listen to.

Bert Carp, a Washington, D.C., lobbyist for Turner Broadcasting,

says he liked what he heard in the halls of Congress Monday. "We are now confident that baseball's proposal has been beaten back."

But David Alworth, Major League Baseball's broadcasting director, would like to remind Carp that Washington also is known as The City That Never Stops Legislating. In response to TBS' Carp waving a checkered flag, Alworth says this is "absolutely still a live issue."

First, a background. The issue that has created (at least temporarily) the kinder, gentler Skip Caray is a congressional debate — or lack of debate — over a proposal that would restrict superstation baseball cablecasts.

Both houses of the U.S. Congress have passed comprehensive legislation affecting many areas of cable TV. Now the bill goes to a joint House-Senate conference, a group that normally irons out differences between each house's bills to create a hybrid meant to sail through Congress.

But Turner Broadcasting, whose TBS network is the largest superstation, detected what it calls a back-door attempt to add an amendment that hadn't been debated. The amendment would force local cable operators to black out superstation games in any TV market where there was also local TV coverage of a game. Those blackouts could extend far and wide — Major League Baseball defines some TV "home markets" as extending into neighboring states.

Wondering why you should care? Well, TBS argues that cable operators faced with game blackouts might decide games from superstations, such as TBS, WGN and WOR, are simply more trouble than they're worth — and drop them altogether.

But Major League Baseball says blackouts would help local broadcasters and cablecasters, who might add more local TV games if they didn't have to compete with superstations for viewers and ad money.

Turner Broadcasting went so far as to actually send protest telegrams to members of Congress in the name of any viewer who called a toll-free number Friday night. About 6,000 viewers called.

But by Monday, the relieved cablecaster was readying its thank-you notes to Congress. Sen. Fritz Hollings, D-S.C., who is chairman of the Senate Commerce committee and is expected to be named to the joint Senate-House conference, weighed in on the issue Monday.

Sort of. Hollings denied that a blackout amendment was even under consideration — calling such talk "ridiculous rumors" — but vowed to stand guard against the phantom threat anyway. "If anyone wants to put it in," said Hollings, "I would give it the Tomahawk Chop."

Still, this is politics — where it ain't over till Congress adjourns. TBS' Carp has a letter from 50 House members opposing the blackout amendment. But Alworth says Major League Baseball also has support among House members who, "In this at-bat, are pitching the cable bill so as to least disadvantage baseball and baseball fans across country."

Stay tuned. Caray might even call some balls and strikes.

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BOSTON GLOBE

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SporTVIEW

JACK CRAIG

A ringing endorsement

Turner's calls for support bring widespread response from audience

DOES THE END JUSTIFY THE MEANS when TBS owner Ted Turner uses Braves telecasts to campaign against proposed legislation that would limit the games his superstation can deliver to its 68 million cable subscribers?

The issue is complex, but a little clarification was provided by Braves play-by-play man Skip Caray

programming. Skip is right; it would lead to the end of the Braves on the superstation."

Dave Alworth, baseball's director of broadcasting, does not conceal his disagreement with Hughes' assessment. "Cable companies know a lot about programming. They could easily handle them. All we are asking is the end of duplicative telecasts," he says.

access to local advertisers. Vincent says that local stations, such as St. Louis Cardinals, must also claim its share of the games. Vincent says that when WGN also pipes the games into St. Louis, the superstations counter that they seek only national advertising, and TBS maintains that local ratings actually increase when it pro-

vides duplicate broadcasts into an opponent's market.

"We think [duplicate broadcasts] build an interest. We think Major League Baseball is wrong," says Carp.

Vincent describes the matter as "ultimately a money issue." ESPN pays \$100 million annually to broadcast 175 games; TBS pays \$20 million in rights fees for 125 games. Confronted with tides of red ink since securing national game rights to baseball through 1993, ESPN has repeatedly complained that superstation broadcasts have adversely affected its flagging ratings, which at the All-Star break were lower than those for Braves broadcasts.

Although TBS is alone in the forefront of fighting baseball on the issue, it's not the only

superstation involved. Chicago's WGN and parent Tribune Co. have not been as strident as TBS, but are just as concerned. "We're ready to roll but Turner was ready to go to the mat a little quicker than we are," said Tribune Co. lobbyist Shawn Sheehan. "Turner was correct to get on the air [with its appeal to viewers]. You cannot grow mushrooms in the dark and it deserves the light of day."

A coalition of 50 congressmen has signed a recommendation to U.S. Rep. John Dingell (Mich.), chairman of the joint conference committee that will consider the bill, urging that the insertion of "rolling blackouts" into the bill be abandoned.

Fowler is confident Vincent's efforts will fail. "Braves fans can rest assured there's no way there will be a cable blackout," he said. "Literally, thousands of Georgians have called and written my office and I have told them all the same thing: There's as much chance there will be a blackout as the Dodgers have of winning the pennant this year. Zero."

SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

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Major League Baseball wants

A P P E N D I X B

<u>MARKET (DMA)</u>	<u>HOME TEAM(S)</u>		<u>BRAVES</u>	<u>BRAVES</u>
	<u>NATIONAL</u>	<u>AMERICAN</u>	<u>HOMES</u>	<u>LOCAL</u> <u>RATING</u>
New York	Mets	Yankees	21,287	0.32
Los Angeles	Dodgers	Angels	18,948	0.39
Chicago	Cubs	White Sox	5,451	0.18
Philadelphia	Phillies	--	12,833	0.49
San Francisco-Oakland	Giants	A's	8,427	0.38
Boston	--	Red Sox	6,411	0.30
Washington/Baltimore	--	Orioles	7,611	0.27
Dallas	--	Rangers	3,902	0.22
Detroit	--	Tigers	4,448	0.26
Houston	Astros	--	4,622	0.32
Atlanta	Braves	--	209,804	14.53
Cleveland	--	Indians	6,139	0.43
Seattle	--	Mariners	7,798	0.57
Minneapolis	--	Twins	3,061	0.23
Miami	Marlins	--	17,665	1.38
Pittsburgh	Pirates	--	9,949	0.88
St. Louis	Cardinals	--	4,484	0.41
Denver	Rockies	--	5,861	0.58
San Diego	Padres	--	3,984	0.44
Milwaukee	--	Brewers	1,847	0.24
Cincinnati	Reds	--	6,177	0.81
Kansas City	--	Royals	3,088	0.41
Toronto	--	Blue Jays	N/A	N/A
Montreal	Expos	--	N/A	N/A

A P P E N D I X C

BRAVES RATINGS/WIN-LOSS & ATTENDANCE

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>WIN-LOSS</u>	<u>STANDING</u>	<u>ATTENDANCE</u>	<u>TV GAMES</u>	<u>RATING</u>	<u>SHARE</u>	<u>HOUSEHOLDS</u>
1980	81-80	4th PLACE	1,048,411	100	N/A	N/A	N/A
1981	*25-29	4th PLACE	N/A	-	N/A	N/A	N/A
	*25-27	5th PLACE	535,418	107	N/A	N/A	N/A
1982	89-73	1st PLACE	1,801,985	117	N/A	N/A	N/A
1983	88-74	2nd PLACE	2,119,935	154	4.9	10.0	1,306,000
1984	80-82	2nd PLACE	1,724,892	150	4.1	8.0	1,302,000
1985	66-96	5th PLACE	1,350,137	154	3.3	6.6	1,140,000
1986	72-89	6th PLACE	1,387,181	144	2.8	5.7	1,001,000
1987	69-92	5th PLACE	1,217,402	150	2.3	4.9	947,000
1988	54-106	6th PLACE	848,089	134	2.2	4.6	976,000
1989	63-97	6th PLACE	984,930	124	1.9	4.0	923,000
1990	65-97	6th PLACE	980,129	109	1.7	3.4	891,000
1991	94-68	1st PLACE	2,140,217	124	2.0	4.2	1,147,000
1992	98-64	1st PLACE	3,077,400	125	2.3	4.7	1,332,000

*SPLIT SEASON DUE TO PLAYERS' STRIKE